

PETITIONER FOR FIRST TERRE HAUTE FREE LIBRARY
 PRESENTS HISTORIC DOCUMENT DRAWN IN 1879
 WHEN CITY LIBRARY WAS FIRST ORGANIZED

Community Affairs File

Jan. 11-1920

An interesting manuscript of historical value was presented to the Fairbanks Memorial Library recently when Dr. J. P. Worrell gave the original copies of the minutes of the first meetings for the purpose of considering action to organize a library in Terre Haute, and the first subscription list which was made, containing the signatures of 74 of the leading citizens of the date of 1879.

In early March, 1879, it was said by Dr. Worrell, a petition for the organization of a library association was circulated among the citizens, 131 persons signing it and pledging support of the movement. A meeting was called for the evening of March 15 and 74 persons gathered at the council chamber to organize their efforts toward establishing a library.

A question raised during the course of the meeting by the Rev. Alexander Sterett evoked discussion which showed that since 131 subscribers to the petition had been obtained and only 74 attended, it would be illegal to take any action in behalf of the subscribers as less than two-thirds of the number attended. After further discussion, the meeting was adjourned and immediately reassembled as a meeting of citizens, and not as a meeting of the subscribers.

The first tangible results of the activities of the public spirited citizens was the formation of the "Terre Haute Library Association," a subscription library then at 624½ Wabash avenue. Individual subscriptions enabled the purchase of a small supply of books for the second-story room which was the beginning of the present city library system.

Election of First Board.

At the second meeting a board of directors, composed of the Rev. C. R. Henderson, Dr. Joseph Richardson, C. R. Peddle, H. D. Scott, Mrs. T. W. Harper, Samuel McKeen and J. M. Allen, was elected and the citizens present pledged themselves by the signing of a subscription list to pay \$1 each toward the organization of a library association.

The school trustees, acting under a law passed in 1880, levied in June, 1881, a tax of two cents on each \$400 of taxable property for library purposes. On May 20,

DO NOT CIRCULATE
REFERENCE

VIGO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

1882, the trustees purchased the property of Terre Haute Library Association by assuming an indebtedness of \$70 and paying a nominal fee of \$1. The 1,140 volumes thus acquired formed the beginning of the Terre Haute Public Library.

Old Minutes Tell Work.

The minutes of the two meetings, which resulted in the formation of a library association, were written by Dr. Worrell, the duties of secretary having been given him by the vote of the assembly. The record of the first meeting is as follows:

"Terre Haute, March 15, 1879

"In response to a call made to the citizens of Terre Haute, a considerable number assembled at the council chamber for the purpose of taking steps toward the establishment of a public library in the city of Terre Haute.

"On the motion of Dr. Joseph Richardson the meeting was organized by the appointment of N. G. Buff, Esquire, to the chair and Dr. J. P. Worrell clerk. The president briefly announced the object of the meeting and declared it ready to consider any proposition. In reply to a request for information from Rev. Alexander Sterrett, it was stated that canvassers had been out for the purpose of securing subscriptions and that 131 names had been obtained. Since two-thirds of the above number were not present as required by the statute, motion was made by Mrs. Harper that those present be enrolled and then organized, other subscribers being obtained subsequently. To this proposition various objections were made by Dr. Richardson, Rev. Mr. Sterrett and others.

"Mr. Forster and Mr. H. D. Scott questioned the legality of a meeting called for the organization of a library to proceed in the absence of those subscribing. At this point, motion to adjourn being made and carried, the meeting adjourned.

"J. P. WORRELL, Clerk."

Meeting Brings Results.

Having thus avoided any possible technicalities which might have detracted from the efficiency of the organization, the assembly was reconvened and the business was resumed. It was recorded by Dr. Worrell as follows:

March 15, 1879

"At a meeting of the citizens assembled at the council chamber for the purpose of

making arrangements for the formation of a library in the city of Terre Haute, an organization was effected by the appointment of N. G. Buff, Esquire, president and Dr. P. J. Worrell, secretary. The president hereby declared the purpose of the meeting and announced it ready for business. There was submitted the names of 64 persons subscribed to the following preamble:

"We, the undersigned citizens of the city of Terre Haute, Vigo County, Ind., hereby severally subscribe toward the establishment of a public library in said city, the sums set opposite our respective names, and severally promise to pay such without relief from valuation or appraisement laws to such person or persons as the board of directors of the Library Association formed upon this subscription as a basis may direct; the capital stock to be one dollar per share; there being 64 of the subscribers of the above preamble present, more than the requisite two-thirds, as required by the statute."

"The meeting proceeded to the election of a board of managers. Upon a motion a committee on nomination consisting of Dr. Joseph Richardson, Rev. E. W. Abbey, and H. D. Scott, Esquire, was appointed. The committee reported the names of the following persons as nominees: Dr. Joseph Richardson, Dr. J. P. Worrell, Mr. F. A. Ross, Rev. C. R. Henderson, Mr. W. W. Burke, Prof. W. Wiley, Mr. R. L. Alder, Mr. C. R. Peddle, Prof. James Wilson, Mr. H. D. Scott, Mrs. T. W. Harper, Miss Eliza Warren, Mr. Samuel McKeen, Mr. J. M. Allen, Mr. J. R. Kendall, and Mr. John Wilkes.

"Election by ballot resulted in the choice of Rev. C. R. Henderson, Dr. Joseph Richardson, Mr. C. R. Peddle, Hon. H. D. Scott, Mrs. T. W. Harper, Mr. Samuel McKeen, and Mr. J. M. Allen, as directors. T. W. Harper offered a motion that canvassers be appointed to solicit subscriptions. Amendment offered by Dr. Worrel that the board be requested to circulate a petition for subscribers to be subsequently presented to the City Council. Amendment carried and motion as amended adopted. On motion the meeting adjourned.

"J. P. WORRELL, Secretary."

On the outside of the folded minutes of the second meeting is a title, handwritten by the secretary, which reads: "Minutes of meeting in interest of Public Library held March 15, 1879."

First Subscription List.

In addition to the minutes of the two meetings presented by Dr. Worrell was another

manuscript, perhaps of more interest than the others. It was the signed subscription list of 74 citizens, only seven of whom are living. The list contains the names of what was probably the 74 most progressive, learned, and public spirited citizens of Terre Haute. All signatures were written in ink by the persons subscribing.

The preamble to the subscription list stated:

"Preamble: We, the undersigned, agree to pay the sum of money set opposite our respective names and do voluntarily associate ourselves to organize a body corporate to be called the Terre Haute Library Association:

"William Eggleston, A. W. Heinley, L. B. Martin, James D. Brown, S. B. Gookins, A. M. Farnham, S. C. Richardson, W. H. Paige, J. T. Scoville, H. P. Townley, Fred A. Ross, M. Joseph, G. E. Brokaw, R. W. Rippetoe, John T. Gulich, E. M. Walmsley, R. L. Alder, J. H. Williams, John Wilkes, R. N. Hudson, C. B. Brokaw, G. F. Cookerly, George S. Flood, John G. Shryer, E. F. Howe, P. E. Tuttle, C. R. Henderson, J. P. Worrell, E. L. Norcross, J. Irving Riddle, J. G. Briggs, James B. Edmunds, W. R. McKeen, P. S. Westfall, Robert S. Cox, Thomas B. Long, C. M. Warren, M. M. Diall, S. C. Beech, Noyes White, Stephen J. Young, H. S. Clift, John G. Williams, Leslie D. Thomas, Joseph Richardson, William H. Wiley, S. F. Ball, Joseph Gilbert, Seth Wilcox, H. D. Scott, C. R. Peddle, M. S. Durham, Herman Hulman, W. W. Byers, Edward W. Abbey, T. H. Riddle, Moses H. Waters, R. S. Tennant, George E. Farrington, Thomas D. Wilson, James Ross, S. R. Henderson, Preston Hussey, J. H. O'Boyle, William Mack, John W. Davis, M. M. Joam, L. A. Burnett, J. Erlanger, C. Rieckert, L. Forster, Thomas E. Knox, F. C. Danaldson, I. H. C. Royce."

The amount set opposite the names was, in each case, one dollar. This was the original financial backing of the Terre Haute library movement, small in itself but sufficient to enable the completion of an organization which, by virtue of its services, proved that a need for it had been existing for some time.